

What Is Christianity?

(Written by Dr. Charles A. Ellwood of the University and published in the Arbitrator.)

What is Christianity? This question has often been discussed from the standpoint of theology and ethics; but it may add interest to the discussion to present the question from the standpoint of sociology and anthropology.

No historical movement has been more misunderstood, alike by friend and foe, than Christianity. This is largely because of lack of sociological and anthropological perspective and knowledge. The Christian movement is evidently not an accident in human history. Indeed, like its political counterpart, modern democracy, it is of the very essence of later social and cultural evolution. To understand what it means, therefore, we must have some insight into the movement of human history as a whole.

Now anthropologists tell us that the whole history of man may be roughly divided into three stages—savagery, barbarism, and civilization. Savagery, in which man is a mere child of nature, living off of the wild fruits of the earth, and the animals that we can kill and eat, making no attempt to control his own destiny, lasted for the race at least one hundred thousand years. Archeological evidence shows, while some belated human groups still survive in it. Barbarism, a transitional stage, in which man begins to cultivate the soil and raise domestic animals, but soon turns his attention to preying upon his fellow-men as an easier method of gaining a livelihood than the mastering of nature, began in Europe about seven or eight thousand years ago with the coming of neolithic man. Civilization only began with the keeping of historic records, with man's coming to social self-consciousness, and with his beginning of the control and conquest of the moral or spiritual element in his life. This stage of human history is, then, a thing of yesterday, only in its beginnings, no more than four or five thousand years old for any people, and scarcely two thousand years old for most Europeans. We began to outgrow barbarism, in other words but yesterday, and it should not be surprising that most of us in some respects are barbarians still.

GROWTH OF HUMAN CULTURE

Now to the sociological imagination this development of human culture presents itself as a parabola, with human knowledge as the chief element of its focus. The lower part of the curve may be taken as representing the one hundred thousand years of savagery, a brute-like ignorance and subjection to the blind forces of nature, through which the race has passed. The upper part of the curve may be taken as the one hundred thousand years of civilization, of mastery over physical nature and human nature, which we may hope lies ahead of our race. The remaining or vertical part of the curve will represent that transitional stage of barbarism through which our race has passed on its way from animality to spirituality, from ignorance to knowledge, from the darkness of savagery to the light of civilization.

Evidently we are now just entering upon the upper part of the curve, with the real work and higher achievement of civilization still lying all ahead of us. The typical institutions of barbarism, of predatory culture, still survive, or have lately existed among us. Yesterday we are evidently still slowly and painfully learning the rudiments of true civilization.

Now the transition from one stage of culture to another is effected, anthropologists tell us, by what are called "pattern ideas." These ideas are formed by the principle of anticipation, far in advance of the complete birth of the new civilization. The human mind sees the need of the advantage, sets up an "ideal," a "pattern" of the thing to be realized, and then by various methods works towards its goal. Thus long before men invented the flying machine they formed the idea of the flying machine. Then they watched the flight of birds and other animals and studied the properties of physical nature until they found methods of realizing their idea of the flying machine. The history of the important things in human culture, in other words, exist first as "pattern ideas" in the minds of men before they are realized in actual life; and they exist, as a rule, long before they are realized.

SAME PRINCIPLE IN RELIGION

Now this principle applies to the great changes in religion and morals, and so in civilization itself, not less than in the realm of mechanical invention. Such changes come through the starting of new pattern ideas or standards in the mind of man. These are reflected upon by the popular mind, and if accepted and approved they become the "mores," the all-powerful standards, of a new culture. But the pattern ideas of a new culture do not arise gradually out of those of the old culture or in general mix harmoniously with them. Rather, cultural evolution proceeds by one type entirely supplanting another type. Thus the standards

of the predatory type of culture known as barbarism must be supplanted by an entirely different type of ideas before we can have true civilization. Nevertheless, the ideals and standards of an older type of culture may persist for an indefinite time alongside of the new, while the new type is emerging. Thus arises a conflict between the old and the new; and it is this which explains the great moral conflicts in modern civilization. As the ideas and standards of a predatory culture have been thousands of years dominant in our tradition, we must expect that they will continue to manifest themselves at times in their old power in the earlier stages of the non-predatory culture upon which we are now entering.

What Christianity is from an anthropological and sociological point of view, must now be manifest. Christianity is a new set of "pattern ideas," marking the dawn of a new civilization, a civilization, a civilization with a non-predatory morality on a humanitarian basis. It is an effort to transcend predatory individual, class, tribal, and national ethics and to replace these with a universalized, social, international, humanitarian ethics. The first faint beginnings of this movement are to be found, of course, in the precursors of Jesus, especially, in the moral and religious ideas of the later prophets of Judaism, but in the life and teachings of Jesus these ideas first came to definite expression. He initiated the revolution of a religious and moral ideas for which the whole of human history had been preparing. We must not look at early Christianity, however, as anything more than a beginning. It has been wrongly regarded by most Christians as marking the completion and perfection of religion and morality. But Christianity can be this only when the Christian movement has achieved its final development and succeeded in establishing a humanitarian civilization, a Christian state of society. To regard Jesus himself as standing other than at the beginning of great new movement in human culture is to misunderstand him culturally and spiritually. Even the words of Jesus, though they be together with his life the torch-bearer of the Christian spirit, mark only the beginning of the unfolding of a new conception of human relationships, a social life non-predatory in character and patterned upon the laws of good-will, mutual service, and brotherhood among men. Christianity is not a static thing. It is a growing living movement, aiming at the creation of a new world.

A NEW WORLD ORDER

Early Christianity was, then the dawn of a new world order, an order which was possibly never to be realized, but which represents the direction in which human history has been developing for the last two thousand years. The new pattern ideas of Christianity were in later predatory civilization in which they started, and this conflict has continued down to the present time. Even now, after two thousand years of slow emergence from the black night of barbarism, the world seems, despite the coming of international peace (unless indeed, we can put an end also to the strife between classes) to be still in danger of relapsing back into it. Nor is this difficult historically to understand. From the first, so-called Christian civilization has been a very mixed affair. Each even in the Christian church has been non-Christian, or rather, stark paganism. The barbarous ideals of power and pleasure as the chief ends of life, which prevailed in pagan antiquity, have been more often triumphant over Christian ideals in our culture than most Christians are willing to admit; for the transition from barbarism to civilization is still far from complete.

Nevertheless, it is fair to say that for the last two thousand years we have witnessed among European peoples the slow upbuilding of true civilization. And Christian ideals of life have been the chief mediators of the process, though now having many auxiliaries in science, industry, government and education. If social progress continues, it is evident that the Christian ideal of a social life based upon love with resulting justice, peace, and good-will between individuals, classes, nations, and races, must be realized, for there is no other pathway open to human society unless it turns back to barbarism. All other ideals have been tried and have proved failures. This is why the genuine Christian sees in Christianity purified from its pagan dress and applied to the social life of man, the hope of the world. But he sees, too, that the world cannot remain any longer half-pagan and half-Christian; that it must become all one or all the other; that we are even now at the parting of the ways. But he does not doubt the ultimate triumph of the Christian ideal of peace and brotherhood among men; for if it be a dream, it is the dream of all humanity that has had a vision of things beyond our barbarous past. The Christian ideal of life is man's dream, his vision, of his social destiny. And thus far the dreams of humanity, if dreamed long enough, have always come true!

Wpa'd Conserve Gas.

A revolution of the motor car industry is now being advocated as a means of conserving fuel supplies. The manufacture of light cars with a high gear ratio and the more frequent use of a shift is considered to be one means of attaining the end whereby a greater efficiency will be effected from our gasoline supplies. It is even urged that cars be equipped with a fourth speed for use along the level stretches of country. This would eliminate the car which can start from a given point and run over hilly roads without changing gears. Continental engineers, it is asserted by those advo-

cating the high gear ratio and the frequent shift, never attempted to design a car that would take the majority of the hills on high.

Women Smuggle Whiskey.

United States revenue officials along the Canadian border report that women "run-runners" are giving them more trouble than are the men who engage in the traffic.

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